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ABSTRACT

A study explored the acquisition of "se" by Spanish-speaking children in Madrid, Spain, looking at: (1) acquisition of multifunctional forms; and (2) the course of acquisition for a linguistic expression that has both anaphoric and non-anaphoric functions, and its relevance to Binding Theory approaches to the acquisition of reflexives. Subjects were native Spanish speakers, middle and upper middle class children: 5 boys and 5 girls in each of 5 age groups--3, 5, 7, 9, and 11 years. Production of various uses of "se" and of non-"se" pronominal clitics was elicited after viewing a videotape. There were six opportunities to produce each of the targeted uses of "se" and non-"se" clitics: (reciprocal, singular reflexive, plural reflexive, singular inherent, plural inherent, spurious dative, and non-"se" pronominal clitics). Analyis of the data revealed an impressive accuracy in young children's production of "se" despite the fact that it functions as both an anaphor and a pronominal. Errors in choice of "se" and "le" are not uni-directional, and there is some early overgeneralization of both. The data point to a need to incorporate an asymmetry in the status of the different uses of "se." Finally, there may be a need to incorporate lexical-specific learning in the acquisition of anaphors and pronominals. (MSE)

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MULTIFUNCTIONAL *SE*: COURSE OF DEVELOPMENT IN SPANISH CHILDREN

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The purpose of this paper is to explore the acquisition of *se* by Spanish-speaking children, with a view to examining two issues: (1) the course of acquisition of multifunctional forms and (2) the course of acquisition for a linguistic expression that has both anaphoric and non-anaphoric functions and its relevance to Binding Theory (BT) approaches to the acquisition of reflexives.

Recent research has focused a great deal of attention on the acquisition of reflexive forms (e.g., Chien & Wexler 1987, Hyams 1988, Hyams & Sigurjonsdottir 1988, Wexler & Manzini 1987). These studies have included some work on the acquisition of Spanish *se*, but primarily in its reflexive use (e.g., Padilla Rivera 1985, Solan 1987). Little is known about the child's knowledge of the other uses of *se*.

Spanish *se* is a clitic on verbs that serves a variety of functions, among them the following that are of interest here: (1) Reciprocal: *se* + plural verb (+ optional: *uno al otro* "one to the other"). E.g., *Se quitan las gafas* [SE-take off,3, pl.,pres. the, pl.-glasses "They take each other's glasses off"]. (2) Reflexive: *se* + singular or plural verb (+ optional: *a sí mismo(s)* "to himself(herself, themselves)"). E.g., *Se quita el reloj* [SE-take off,3,sg.,pres.-the-watch "He takes his watch off"]. (3) Inherent/Reflexiva Tantum (*se* acts as part of the lexical item): *se* + singular or plural verb. E.g., *Se cae* [SE-fall,3, sg.,pres. "She falls"]. (4) Spurious Dative: *se* acts as a substitute for the pronominal *le(s)* when there are two third-person clitics on the verb. E.g., *Le pone un anillo y se lo quita* [IO,3,sg.-put on,3,sg., pres.-a-ring-and-SE-D.O.,3,sg.-take off,3,sg.,pres. "He puts the ring on her and takes it off her"]. (For information on these and other uses, see Garcia 1977, Geniušienė 1987, Manzini 1986, Wehrli 1986.)

There are two main theoretical perspectives that may shed light on the acquisition of these uses of *se*: (1) Karmiloff-Smith's (1979, 1983, 1986) theories regarding the acquisition of multi-functional words, and (2) Binding Theory and its approach to the acquisition of reflexive (anaphoric) and non-anaphoric pronominal forms.

From Karmiloff-Smith's work, we can predict the following course of acquisition. First, from approximately 3 to 5 years, the child will show an early facility with many or all of these uses of *se*. The various uses may be treated as homonymic. At an intermediate stage (at approximately 7 to 10 years), the child may give evidence of associating and pulling together the disparate uses in his or her mental lexicon. There may be some evidence of attempts at differentiating those uses on the surface, either through the use of some ungrammatical constructions or the overspecification of meanings, as the child realizes that there is more than one function for the same form. Especially relevant would be forms like *Se quitan las gafas*, ambiguous between a Reciprocal and a plural Reflexive meaning ("They take off each other's/their own glasses"), and *Se lo pone*, ambiguous between a Reflexive and a Spurious

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Dative reading ("He puts it on himself/her"). At an advanced stage (after 10 years), the child should have established a linguistic system in which all or most of the functions of *se* are related. However, overt use of *se* will look similar to that of 3- to 5-year-olds. That is, whatever ungrammaticality or over-specification is in evidence at an intermediate stage should disappear by this point in development.

According to GB Theory and the theory of Universal Grammar, the child is endowed with the Binding Principles innately. (There is, however, room for the maturation of the principles, so they need not necessarily be available from the beginning (Hyams 1988, Borer & Wexler 1987)). Among other things, acquisition entails having to learn which lexical items are anaphors and which are pronominals (and which are referential). The first and second of the above-mentioned uses of *se* are clearly anaphoric uses; use (4) is clearly pronominal. (Use (3) evolved historically from the anaphoric reflexive. See Manzini 1986, Wehrli 1986 for possible GB treatments.)

According to BT, we can predict the following (taking only local binding into consideration):

(1) Early facility with *se*, or at least sudden emergence. (It may take some time for children to realize that an individual lexical item is anaphoric or pronominal, but once they do, they should be able to attach it to the relevant binding principle and use it appropriately.) OR

(2) The child may show initial confusion about *se* because of its anaphoric and non-anaphoric status. (See Solan 1987.) OR

(3) The child may avoid the pronominal use of *se*. Given that this use is less frequent overall than the anaphoric uses of *se*, the child may flag *se* as an anaphor and treat it uniformly so. OR

(4) The child may first learn the separate uses of *se* as homonyms. The child could then learn for each homonym whether it is an anaphor or a pronominal and what its governing category is. If, however, all the *se*'s function in the adult language as a single lexical item, as some have argued (Garcia 1977, Manzini 1986, Wehrli 1986), there may be some later confusion or differentiation of the anaphoric and pronominal uses, as according to Karmiloff-Smith's theories.

(5) If one of the first three possibilities is the case, the acquisition of the use of *se* for the Reciprocal and the Reflexive should be similar. Once the child has realized that *se* is anaphoric, the treatment should be identical.

(6) Further, regardless of which of the first four courses is followed, semantics and pragmatics should not play a role.

And (7), again regardless of which of the first four courses is followed, lexical considerations (which verb *se* is attached to) should not play a role. That is, there should be no evidence of lexically-based acquisition, at least not within a given use of *se*.

METHOD. In this study, children's production of various uses of *se*, as well as non-*se* pronominal clitics, was elicited. Children were shown videotapes and asked to describe what they saw. In the tapes, there were five skits performed by five pairs of actors. Those skits provided contexts in which the uses of *se* or non-*se* clitics were appropriate. There were six opportunities for subjects to produce each of the target-

ed uses of *se* and non-*se* clitics: Reciprocal, Singular Reflexive, Plural Reflexive, Singular Inherent, Plural Inherent, Spurious Dative, and Non-*se* pronominal clitics (*Coge el muñeco y lo/le besa* [take,3,sg.,pres.-the-doll-and-D.O.-kiss,3,sg.,pres. "She takes the doll and kisses it"].) For the Reciprocal and Reflexive, the skits also provided two opportunities each to produce 2-clitic constructions (e.g., *Se quita el reloj y se lo pone* "She takes off her watch and puts it on").

Children were tested individually. All responses were taped and later transcribed.

Subjects: Subjects were native Spanish speakers, middle and upper middle class children living in Madrid. There were 10 children, 5 boys and 5 girls, at each of 5 age groups: 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11. Mean ages and ranges for these groups were 3;11 (3;7-4;3), 5;3 (4;7-6;0), 7;8 (6;8-8;1), 9;2 (8;7-10;2), and 11;6 (10;6-12;3).

RESULTS. The average number of attempts by each child to refer to each of the targeted types of action was 3.5. X^2 analysis reveals no significant difference in the relative number of times children across age groups produced utterances about the distinct types of action. The accuracy of those attempts was as follows: Singular Inherent 73.8%, Plural Inherent 85.4%, Plural Reflexive 86.4%, Reciprocal 87.8%, Non-*se* 88.1%, Singular Reflexive 90.3%, Spurious Dative 90.7%. Analysis of variance, with Use (Reciprocal, Sing. Reflexive, etc.) a within-subjects variable and Age and Sex across-subjects variables, revealed a main effect of Use ($F=3.34$, $df=6$, $p<.017$), wherein performance on the Singular Inherent was worse than performance on the Reciprocal, Non-*se*, Reflexive Singular, and Spurious Dative *se*. Individual analyses within Uses also revealed an age difference within the Singular Reflexive, with the 3-year-olds performing worse than the children at higher ages.

Both of these results are due primarily to children's use of a plural verb when a singular verb was required. All children showed this type error in the Singular Inherent contexts, and 3-year-olds did so in the Singular Reflexive context. This type error appears to reflect a certain "sloppiness" in referring to the actions in the videos, whereby children would refer to a single person performing an action (*se rie* "she is laughing") with a plural (*se rien* "they are laughing"). The fact that subjects never marked the verb number incorrectly when there was only one person in the picture, only when both persons were present, supports this conclusion.

If we ignore verb number in such cases and take these cases as "correct" (although "sloppy"), we get a different picture. When incorrect verb number is ignored for all cases except that of the Reciprocal, ("sloppiness" is not possible here: use of a singular verb leads to completely ungrammatical results), reanalysis shows a main effect of Use of *se* ($F=7.32$, $df=6$, $p<.001$), wherein the performance on the Reciprocal was worse than performance on all the other uses (Reciprocal 87.8%, Spurious Dative 90.7%, Non-*se* 91.1%, Singular Reflexive 96.8%, Plural Reflexive 97.7%, Singular and Plural Inherent 100%). Given the criteria used for "correct" use, it is not surprising that the Reciprocal should turn out significantly distinct from the rest. But I will return to the Reciprocal below. The reanalyzed figures indicate, however, that lower

performance on the Inherent Singular in the first analysis was due entirely to "sloppiness" in the choice of verb number.

Reanalysis also showed an Age X Use interaction ($F=2.75$, $df=24$, $p<.010$). This interaction reveals that at age 3, performance on the Spurious Dative (58.33%) was worse than that on the Reciprocal (86.11%), the Singular and Plural Reflexive (100%), and the Singular and Plural Inherent (100%), and performance on Non-*se* clitics (66.7%) was worse than that on the Singular and Plural Reflexive, and the Singular and Plural Inherent.

The first of these results (showing Spurious Dative distinct from all but Non-*se*) was due primarily to 3-year-olds' use of only one of the two clitics in the Spurious Dative situations. Examples of these types of errors are M's and J's utterances in reference to a woman sprinkling water on a towel that a man is holding: M: *Se van a lavar con un paño. Lo--Se--Se moja y él lo ha dejado en la silla.* ("They are going to wash themselves with a rag. She wets it--SE--SE, and he has left it on the chair" [should be *se lo moja*].) J: *Mojándole* ("wetting him" [should be *mojándoselo*]).

Results showing Non-*se* distinct from the Reflexive and the Inherent uses are all due to 3-year-olds' use of *se* with the verb *peinar* ("to comb") in a situation in which a woman was combing a man's hair. Subjects should have said "le peina," but 4 out of 10 responses at 3 years were "se peina". Interestingly, the non-*se* clitic required here was *le*, not *lo* or *la*. The only other Non-*se* situation that admitted of *le* (animate object) as an alternative to *lo* or *la* (inanimate objects) [*le besa* (a girl kisses a doll)] never elicited this *se* response.

Looking simply at correct vs. incorrect constructions obscures some differences between children's uses of forms, differences that are relevant to the question of their knowledge of *se*. Of particular interest are the Reciprocal and the Plural Reflexive. A comparison of the distribution of constructions used in the Reciprocal and Plural Reflexive contexts confirms that children show a high degree of knowledge about these structures. The choices of structures are shown in Table 1. With the Plural Reflexive, 97% of utterances involved the use of *se*. Errors consisted primarily of the choice of the singular instead of the plural (21.3% of utterances), which can be attributed to the type of "sloppy" reference found above with the Inherent Singular. With the Reciprocal, only 82.8% of utterances involved *se*. Of these only 8.3% involved use with a singular verb. Examples of these are shown in Table 2. This general avoidance of the singular with the Reciprocal indicates children are sensitive to the ungrammaticality of the singular for the Reciprocal. (However, see discussion below regarding the types of elaborations used by 11-year-olds.)

At the same time, the choice of structures suggests important differences in children's treatment of the Reciprocal and the Reflexive. One form that is used in the Reciprocal contexts that is seldom used in the Reflexive contexts is *le*. This sometimes is used in appropriate constructions in which the child uses a compound, as in Table 3. However, it also occurs in inappropriate or ungrammatical constructions, such as those in Table 4.[1]

Further differences appear on examination of children's elaborations of these two structures. Following Karmiloff-Smith's theories, it is important to know if children in an intermediate age group undergo a period of either producing ungrammatical sentences or overmarking of distinctions for ambiguous structures. In Table 5, the occurrence of elaborations with Reciprocal and Plural Reflexive constructions is

TABLE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF STRUCTURES FOR RECIPROCAL AND PLURAL REFLEXIVE

	Structure Used					
	Se+Sing.	Se+Pl.	Inf.+Se	O+Verb	Le+Sg.	Le+Pl
Recip. Context	8.3	68.0	6.5	7.7	7.6	.7
Pl. Refl. Context	21.3	63.5	12.2	2.0	0	.4

TABLE 2
USES OF SE WITH A SINGULAR VERB IN A RECIPROCAL CONTEXT

AN (3) Uno se está tocando a...otro. (one-SE-is-touching-D.O.,animate-other)
IM (5) Se tira...el niño al padre y el padre al niño. (SE-throw,3,sg.,pres.-the-boy-to the-father-and-the-father-to the-boy)
MI (5) Ahora se está peinando. (now-SE-is-combing)
MI (5) Se--se está dando un beso. (SE--SE-is-giving-a-kiss)
TE (11) Y uno se peina al otro. La chica al chico, y la--el chico a la chica. (and-one-SE-comb,3,sg.,pres.-D.O.,animate-the-other the-girl-to the-boy-and-the--the-boy-to-the-girl)
AL (11) Ahora uno se está peinando el pelo de otro. (now-one-SE-is-combing-the-hair-of the-other)
AB (11) Y se pone...la una a la otra se pone un sombrero. (and-SE-put,3,sg.,pres.-the-one-to-the-other-SE-put,3,sg.,pres.-a-hat)
T (11) Y las dos--una se pone--una le pone el sombrero a otro, y la otra a el. (and-the-two--one-SE-put,3,sg.,pres.--one-IO,3,sg.-put,3,sg.,pres.-the-hat-on-another-and-the-other-on-him)

TABLE 3
(APPROPRIATE) USES OF LE IN COMPOUND CONSTRUCTIONS IN A RECIPROCAL CONTEXT

AB (5) Y faltaban los sombreros. A--Es--Un--Una persona le ha dado su--el gorro a ella y otra--y esta persona le ha dado el--el (gorro). [And the hats were missing. Uh--It is--One--One person has given her--the hat to her and another--and this person has given her the--the hat.]
DA (7) Y la señora...le toca la barba...al señor. Y la--y el señor a la--en la barbilla a la señora. [And the woman touches the man on his beard. And the--and the man on the--the woman on the chin.]
L (9) Y ahora la señora le va a peinar al señor y el señor a la señora. [And now the woman is going to comb the man('s hair) and the man the woman('s).]
LM (11) ...y le está tirando...agua al...al hijo y...el hijo al padre. [and he is throwing water at the son and the son at the father.]

TABLE 4
(INAPPROPRIATE/UNGRAMMATICAL) USES OF LE IN PLURAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN RECIPROCAL CONTEXTS

M (3) Le han metido el (dedo) en la boca. [LE-they have-stuck-the-finger-in-the-mouth]
M (3) Le han puesto el dedo...{a cada lado/acá al lado}. [LE-they have-put-the finger-{to-each-side/here-at the-side}]
P (3) Y--y le ponen gafas. [And--and-LE-they put on-glasses]
JO (5) Le dan un beso. [LE-they give-a-kiss]

TABLE 5[3]
OCCURRENCE OF ELABORATIONS IN RECIPROCAL AND PLURAL REFLEXIVE CONTEXTS

	Reciprocal			Plural Reflexive		
	1 clitic	2 clitics	TOTAL	1 clitic	2 clitics	TOTAL
3's	5/39	0/7	5/47	0/40	0/15	0/55
	12.8%	0%	10.6%	0%	0%	0%
5's	9/52	2/15	11/67	2/44	1/20	3/64
	17.3%	13.3	16.4%	4.5%	5.0	4.7%
7's	22/59	2/17	24/76	9/54	5/21	14/75
	37.3%	11.8	31.6	16.7%	23.8	18.7%
9's	24/65	2/13	26/78	6/63	7/26	13/89
	36.9%	15.4	33.3	9.5%	26.9	14.6%
11's	17/61	3/19	20/80	5/61	5/22	10/83
	27.9%	15.8	25.0%	8.2%	22.7	12.0%

shown. These data reveal the following: First, the use of elaborations with Reciprocals was much more frequent than with the Plural Reflexive. This held overall and in the 1-clitic construction[3]. Second, there is a considerable increase in the use of elaborations at 7 years of age. Their use remains high through ages 9 and 11. This development with age is fairly consistent with Karmiloff-Smith's work. (The generally greater use of elaborations with one-clitic constructions over two-clitic constructions also supports the view that children are disambiguating. Note that two-clitic constructions occur only in contexts in which referents have already been established. Thus, such utterances are pragmatically unambiguous.)

An examination of the <u>types</u> of elaborations reveals further information. The prevalent elaborations fall into 4 major categories: *uno a(l) otro* ("one to the other"), *los dos* ("both"), a compound, and others (e.g., *juntos* ("together"), *al revés* ("backwards"), *a la mujer* ("to the woman")). The distribution of these elaborations is as in Table 6. Note the following:

(1) For the Reciprocal, there is some evidence at age 7 of children's "pulling apart" of the meaning encoded: There is extensive use of 2 clauses, compounded, with *le* or no clitic.

(2) The elaborations change with age. It appears that children are sorting out the strange syntax of the Reciprocal. (It has a <u>plural</u> verb accompanied by the expression *uno al otro* ("<u>one</u> to the other").) As noted, at 7, there is extensive use of 2 clauses, compounded. At 9, children favor the use of *los dos*; they appear to have learned that the verb must be <u>plural</u>. In fact, two children at this age used the (inappropriate) plural *unos a otros*, as if they were trying to make this expression the subject of the plural verb. At 11, subjects prefer to use *uno a otro* or, sometimes, *mutuamente* ("mutually"). With the former they sometimes try to make the verb <u>singular</u>. They appear to be trying to make *uno* the subject; they even move it to the front, to subject position, where it is never used in the adult language. See examples at the end of Table 2.

(3) The elaborations are not all disambiguating. Note, for example, that *los dos* is used for both the Reciprocal and the Reflexive.

This last observation, along with the fact that there is an asymmetry between the Reciprocal and Reflexive elaborations, noted above, suggests that children's elaborations at ages 7 through 11 reflect something more than simple attempts at disambiguation.

One alternative explanation might draw on the notion of competition (see, e.g., MacWhinney 1987). The child now has available a variety of structures, and these compete for surfacing. However, a simple competition account cannot explain the observed asymmetry between the Reciprocal and Reflexive elaborations. It also cannot account for the greater presence of elaborations with 1-clitic constructions over 2-clitic constructions.

A second possibility draws on Lakoff's (1987) work on radial categories. It appears that the children may be building a radial category for *se* with the Reflexive at the center. The Reflexive can then be taken as the "default" interpretation for *se*, and any deviation from

TABLE 6
DISTRIBUTION OF ELABORATIONS IN RECIPROCAL AND PLURAL REFLEXIVE ONE-CLITIC CONTEXTS

		Uno a(l) otro	Los dos	Compound	Other	Total*
3	Recip.	2	1	-	2	5
	Refl.	-	-	-	-	-
5	Recip.	4	-	2	5	9
	Refl.	-	1	1	-	2
7	Recip.	5	5	11	13	22
	Refl.	-	2	6	1	9
9	Recip.	6	9	6	10	24
	Refl.	-	3	3	-	6
11	Recip.	8	3	5	9	17
	Refl.	-	1	3	1	5

*Note: some utterances had more than one elaboration. Thus, the TOTAL column is not a simple addition of the first four columns.

this use can be marked explicitly as such. This would explain why the "disambiguating" expressions are more rarely added to the Reflexive than to the Reciprocal.[4]

No one of these possibilities alone can explain all of the facts about children's elaborations. The probability is that a combination of these factors is in operation. Only further work will reveal the relative contributions of each factor.

Looking at the data from the point of view of BT:

(1) The children do show a remarkable early facility with *se*, which is consistent with the theory.

(2) Children do not generally show any confusion due to the dual status of *se* as both an anaphor and pronominal. This lack of confusion needs to be explained. One explanation available under BT is to argue that the child is simply learning various homonymic *se*'s and learns the status of each homonym individually. Alternatively, perhaps the child learns early on that Spurious Dative *se* is a special case, which involves a surface-level phonological rule changing *le* to *se*. This *se* need never be associated with the others.

(3) Somewhat harder to explain under BT is the differential behavior of Reflexive *se* vs. Reciprocal *se*. We have seen, first, that there is a difference in confusion with *le*. Reciprocal *se* appears to be associated with *le*, while Reflexive *se* never is. Second, there is an asymmetry in the occurrence of elaborations with these. This difference points to the development of a radial structure for *se*, a structure that is incompatible with a BT account.

(4) In addition, there appears to be some lexical-specific learning. As noted above, for *le peina*, some 3-year-olds produce *se peina*, but they never use *se besa* for *le besa*. This difference is doubtless related to a probable greater frequency of occurrence of *peinar* with *se* in the adult input, including in its use as a "reflexive causative" (see Geniušienė 1987).

(5) Finally, under BT, it is difficult to explain the 11-year-olds' attempts at making *uno* the subject of the Reciprocal sentences in which anaphoric *se* occurs. According to BT, by 11 years of age, children

should have a well-established understanding of the anaphoric status of *se*. It seems implausible that children with such knowledge would try to make *uno* the subject of these sentences.

CONCLUSION. 1. There is an impressive accuracy in young children's production of *se*. This is despite the fact that, according to a BT account, it functions as both an anaphor and a pronominal.

2. Errors in the choice of *se* and *le* are not uni-directional. There is some early overgeneralization of both *se* for *le* (e.g., in *se peina*) and *le* for *se* (in the Reciprocal construction).

3. The data point to a need to incorporate an asymmetry in the status of the different uses of *se*. For at least certain verbs, the Reflexive is located at the center, as the default interpretation; the other uses of *se* are extended in a "motivated" fashion from the Reflexive.

4. There may be a need to incorporate lexical-specific learning in the acquisition of anaphors and pronominals. Children's use of *se peina* for *le peina*, but not *se besa* for *le besa*, may be indicative of a larger problem children learning Spanish have to face as they learn the whole range of Inherent, Reciprocal, Reflexive, and other uses of *se*.

NOTES

[1]The fact that these are errors of le for se, rather than the plural les for se, suggests that the source of the errors lies less in the semantics than in the surface forms of these structures.

[2]Note: Although these elaborations are generally distributed across the lexical items, there is one context for which the Reciprocal never took an elaboration: a man and a woman giving each other a kiss, for which children used se besan/se dan un beso.

[3]This was not the case in the 2-clitic construction. However, on close examination, the frequent use of elaborations with the 2-clitic Reflexive was restricted to a single context: that of a father and son putting shoes on after having removed them. All but 3 of these involved the use of a compound, reflecting a difference in timing as the father and son in the skit put their shoes back on. The other three cases involved the use of los dos.

[4]It may, of course, be more complex than this. It seems that although for some verbs, the Reflexive is the default interpretation, for others, the Reciprocal is (and for others perhaps alternative uses are). For example, recall that Reciprocal utterances with besar ("to kiss") were never accompanied by any elaboration, suggesting that the Reciprocal is the default interpretation for se besan. See note 2.

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